

Sunday School

PAUL A PRISONER—BEFORE FESTUS AND AGRIPPA.

October 24. Acts 26:19-32.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."—2 Tim. 1:12.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M.—Acts 25:1-12.

Th.—Acts 26:19-32.

T.—Acts 25:13-27.

F.—2 Cor. 5:1-15.

W.—Acts 26:1-18.

S.—John 5:39-47.

S.—2 Tim. 1:1-12.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 78. What is forbidden in the ninth commandment?

A. The ninth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbor's good name.

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

How Paul Preached to Festus and Agrippa—

The story of his conversion, vs. 6-19.

The gospel which he preached, vs. 20-23.

Agrippa almost persuaded, vs. 24-32.

LESSON COMMENTS.

Introductory.—Paul lay in prison at Caesarea for two years and Festus assumed the reigns of government instead of Felix. "Festus was a much better man than Felix. Little is known of him; but, a cynic in philosophy and a skeptic in religion, he was yet probably free from those debasing vices which disgraced his predecessor. As a judge it was evident that he desired to do right and yet to conciliate the people. He put down the roving bands of robbers in Palestine." In a short time after he succeeded Felix, he went to Jerusalem, and the high priest and other Jewish notables requested him to bring Paul to Jerusalem, conspiring all the while to kill him. But Festus refused their prayer; saying that he should be kept at Caesarea; and if they had any accusations to make against him, they could go to Caesarea and make them. They did so; but they could prove nothing against the apostle. Still Festus, to gratify the Jews, proposed to Paul to go to Jerusalem to be tried; but he insisted on his rights and appealed to Caesar.

Comment.—Having rehearsed these things to his royal audience, he addressed Agrippa himself in their presence, and informed him that he obeyed the unmistakable command of the Lord from heaven and preached the gospel in Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea and to the Gentiles; urging the people everywhere to repent, reform and live holy lives. It was for these causes that the Jews in the temple apprehended him and tried to take his life. But God, by a special providence, delivered him from his enemies and he, to that very day, continued to bear witness to all classes, that he believed the writings of Moses and the prophets, that pointed to the coming Messiah. Christ, who appeared to him in the vision, had fulfilled those prophecies; had suffered for our sins; had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven; and had come as the Light of the World, to give all men a knowledge of the truths of redemption.

Festus seemed to be deeply impressed with Paul's personal testimony and cried out: "Paul, thou art beside thyself." He said that his great learning had unbalanced him. But Paul said he was not insane, but uttered the truth: "eternal realities." He was temperate in their presentation. The religion of Jesus Christ is a sane, rational system. It contains many things "above reason, but not contrary to reason." He expressed confidence in Agrippa's knowledge of these doctrines of the Jewish scriptures and many witnesses could testify to the truth of the great events of Christ's sufferings, death and resurrection as well as Paul's regeneration and call. There was nothing to conceal. Sincerity loves light. Paul now with holy boldness and sanctified tact preaches a personal sermon to Agrippa; confiding in his knowledge of and faith in the prophets. The King responds to the direct appeal of the great preacher; but just what he meant by his answer is difficult to decide. "Agrippa's words accordingly, are the expression, not of a half-belief, but of a cynical sneer. Thou

art trying to make a Christian of me with very few words, on very slender grounds, would be the nearest paraphrase of his derisive answer to St. Paul's appeal." Alfred in Peloubet. "Agrippa appears to have been moved by the apostle's earnest manner, but attempts to conceal his emotion under the form of a jest." The words "almost" and "altogether" in the English version are objectionable. The intellect is governed by the laws of evidence, and the mind of Agrippa may have felt the force of Paul's statement of facts and arguments; but his heart and life were not changed. Paul took advantage of the least appearance of an impression made upon him, and said that he wished that he and all his audience were believers in Jesus; but he did not wish them to be bound with chains as he was. After the address, Agrippa, Festus, Bernice and others left the room and conferred with each other and agreed that Paul was innocent, and did not deserve death or bondage. But the only difficulty about setting him at liberty was his appeal to Caesar. "The exquisite mixture of severity and tenderness in this allusion" (of Paul) "to his own unjust confinement, and the accompanying wish for their exemption both from this and from a far worse bondage, forms a noble peroration of this great discourse, and an appropriate winding up of the whole series of apologies, which occupied the history of Paul's last visit to the holy land," Alexander.

Doctrinal and Practical.—(1) Paul had a religious experience and could describe it to others. He enjoyed an experimental knowledge of the truths of Christianity. He tested them for himself and felt their saving efficacy. True preaching and teaching are the presentation of "truth through personality." Do we as Sabbath-school teachers tell our classes our religious experience? Can we give them the reasons of our hope, joy and love? Can we show them the way to be Christians? It is to be feared that many professed Christians have no experience. "Let us obey; we then shall know and feel our sins forgiven."

(2) The change of heart and life of Paul are abiding proofs of God's sovereign grace and almighty power. A true Christian is the best evidence of the truth of the Christian religion. Two infidels once met in a certain place and agreed to write each a book against Christianity. One selected "The Conversion of Paul" as his subject; and the other, "The Resurrection of Jesus." They were to write independently and return to the same place, after completing their labors. They separated and thought and read and wrote; and as they carefully examined their subjects, the light dawned upon them, and each wrote an unanswerable work in favor of the religion of Jesus and not against it.

(3) Regeneration, repentance and faith lie at the foundation of Christian experience and Christian character. After Paul's conversion there was a complete change in his volitions, views, feelings and conduct. He prayed, witnessed, suffered, persevered and triumphed. Good morals are the fruits of religion.

(4) Worldlings think Christians are fools. Festus supposed that Paul was mad. The Jews said that Jesus had a devil, Beelzebub, and was a Samaritan. They said that the prophet that foretold the death of Jezebel was mad. Many ministers, reformers and Christian workers are today characterized as unreasonable, extreme, enthusiasts, fanatics, if they accomplish large results. Satan lets us alone when we do nothing. Christianity is "divine philosophy" and insanity is only an abuse of civilization. There is no insanity among the aborigines. There is no argument in hard names. The unconverted man is void of understanding. (1 Cor. 2:14).

(5) The study of prophecy and history together is very interesting and profitable. It confirms our faith. The gospels record the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament in regard to the sufferings and death of Christ. History and prophecy are two leaves of the same book.

(6) Fine Christians desire others to trust in Jesus and do His will. Paul wished Festus, Agrippa, Bernice and all who heard him to be followers of Jesus. The prayer of Knox was: "Give me Scotland or I die." Paul's prayer for his own people was, that they might be saved. (Romans 10:1). Are we as Christian parents, Sabbath-school teachers and ministers deeply concerned about the personal salvation of those committed to our care?

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